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**NEWS GLOBAL****Beslan marks tragedy anniversary**

Thursday 01 September 2005, 19:43 Makka Time, 16:43 GMT

A lone bell tolled in Beslan on Thursday, a year to the minute after Chechen fighters attacked a school and triggered a hostage crisis that left more than 300 dead, half of them children.

As Russia began three days of events to mark a massacre that horrified the world, mourning in Beslan and remembrance ceremonies elsewhere in the country were accompanied by renewed questioning of the role of top Russian officials in the crisis and accusations of high-level responsibility and coverup from victims' families.

The bell rang at precisely 9.15am (0515 GMT) and was followed by Mozart's Requiem played quietly at the site of the attack as hundreds of people, victims' families and others, gathered to lay flowers in the ruins of the school's gymnasium where most of the victims died.

Security was tight and streets in the area around the destroyed school were cordoned off by police while people were required to pass through metal detectors to enter the school grounds and walk outside the gymnasium, where photographs of the victims were posted on walls.

**Rising toll**

A young woman who had been in a coma since being wounded in the crisis died several weeks ago, bringing to 331 the number of victims killed in the tragedy, 186 of whom were children.

Thirty-one of the armed men who took more than 1100 people hostage, to demand that Russian troops pull out of Chechnya, were also killed when the three-day crisis climaxed in a fierce battle with security forces.

A sole surviving hostage-taker is currently on trial.



North Ossetians are observing three days of official mourning

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The anniversary revived both intense grief and impassioned debate about how the crisis happened and what has been done since.

Relatives of children killed at Beslan, in an open letter read outside the school ruins by a victim's mother, used the occasion to lash out at President Vladimir Putin, saying they had lost any hope of an impartial investigation and asking for asylum abroad.



**Sussana Dudiyeva heads the Beslan Mother's Committee**

Putin "sacrificed our children and our loved ones for a dirty policy", the letter read, according to a copy obtained by AFP.

It was signed by dozens of Beslan residents and stated that they had "lost all hope of learning the truth about the main people".

### **Putin meeting**

The Russian leader was scheduled to meet face-to-face at the Kremlin on Friday with a group of victims' mothers who have demanded that he and other top officials be held to account for the tragedy, the deadliest hostage-taking in recent memory.

The Kremlin's special envoy to the volatile North Caucasus region, Dmitry Kozak, met with some of the family members in Beslan and admitted afterwards that he had tried to "reassure" them but not to address their complaints.

Putin meanwhile joined students and faculty at a university, where he led a moment of silence.

"Millions of people in our country and abroad, anyone with a heart who heard about this terrible catastrophe, of course remembers this nightmare," Putin said in the southern city of Krasnodar.

"Let us not speak useless words in this situation but instead observe several seconds of silence. Remember our children, those who are dead, who were victims of terrorists."

### **Loved ones**

The walls of the Beslan school were draped with red cloth decorated with white doves, and people circled the school in small groups, laying flowers and lighting candles beneath the photographs of their loved ones.

"Why? Why is he dead?" one victim's mother wailed, trying to stanch the flow of her tears with a corner of her headscarf.

At the entrance to the gym, water ran over two black marble plaques that frame the door in a "wall of tears" as local residents waited in a long line to visit the ruins of the building, many of the women dressed in black.

Kozak and provincial leaders were present at the school, where the crowd of those who came to pay their respects reached around 1000 people.



**Intense grief and impassioned debate marks the anniversary**

The entire province of North Ossetia, where the town is located, was observing three days of official mourning.

Commemorative rallies and other events were also planned in Moscow and other parts of the country.

Meanwhile an independent Russian journalist who works for Western media outlets including US-funded Radio Liberty was briefly detained in Beslan before being expelled, due to what authorities said were irregularities in his accreditation.

A team from the US television network ABC also decided to leave Beslan and return to Moscow after the local accreditation needed to cover the anniversary was withdrawn, an employee said.

AFP



**Nurpachi Kulaiyev is the only alleged hostage-taker on trial**

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